

# Celebrating Jean Rae's 50 years in Leisure!

*I've worked in Leisure for over 50 years, so much happened I don't know how to put it all down in a couple of pages"*

I left school at 16 wanting to be an accountant – however all the courses were full. While waiting for a space to open up, I applied to Glasgow Corporation for a job. The choice was between finance or a post at Bellahouston Sports Centre.

I attended an interview at Bellahouston Sports Centre, the first sports centre to open in Scotland, and that's where I got my start in leisure.

It was great to be involved with something new. I learned so much in the 6 years I worked there by taking on every task I could: managing the booking programme, helping the clubs and groups, assisting at the local or major national competitions held at the centre, and working with junior and disability sports groups. I had the opportunity to try every sport/activity I could in my own time. I tried Squash, Badminton, Table Tennis, Volleyball, Fencing, Archery, Trampolining, Keep Fit classes (group exercises) and even gymnastics warm-ups.

I ended up joining the fencing club, fencing in competitions across the UK and helping to run any competitions held in the area. I attended a course at Inverclyde National Sports Centre and qualified as a Fencing Coach. I also trained as a Keep Fit and Gym Instructor and helped coach in both these areas.

I loved working there and I met so many lovely people.

When I had been working at the centre for 6 years, there was a reorganisation, and I was offered the Assistant Manager's position at James Murray Sports Centre, Baillieston. At 22, I was one of the first women in a management position in Scotland.

James Murray was a smaller centre than Bellahouston and had a sports hall, function hall, gym, squash court, meeting room, sauna and a café. I still remember the kids turning up for the Irish Dancing on a Sunday – as soon as they came through the entrance door, they started dancing along the corridor to the function hall, with their arms straight by their side and their shoes clacking – a very noisy entrance. I'd kept up with my favourite activities

I started in Bellahouston and started a women's 'Keep Fit' class using the gym and the hall for an exercise to the current hits music, which was a great success with between 30 and 50 women attending each week.

I started a fencing club for children 12 years and up, which grew and grew. I wanted this to be open to all, so we undertook fundraising so that the children and parents didn't need to pay for equipment, nor entry or travel to competitions. We went all over the country, taking part, sometimes winning and always having fun.



Amongst all this, I got married, gained a great step-daughter, achieved my Diploma in Management Studies, fenced in competitions (even winning a few!), and passed my driving test. A lot in just 4 years!

My next job was Manager of Helenvale Park, an astroturf outdoor athletic and football park, next to Celtic Football Park. I ended up having a few stern discussions with the Celtic Managers on how they couldn't just turn up and use the pitch. On the athletics side, we had athletics days for children, bringing up some great athletes of the time, like Alan Pascoe, the famous hurdler at the time.

Two years later, I took a 5-year break, had two lovely boys, kept the fencing club going, and trained a few British champions at the Under 16 and Under 18 level. I started some Keep Fit classes at local venues and ended up out every night of the week and some afternoons. Another really exciting time of meeting new people, especially the ladies at the Keep Fit who were fun-loving, interesting people, and I made some lifelong friends.

I returned to work as an Assistant Manager in Linwood Sports Centre, a large centre with an eight-court hall, gym, squash courts and an outdoor synthetic pitch (replaced with a new, bigger and more modern centre now). I improved the children's weekend club, increasing the attendance and the participation in the exercise classes. A run-of-the-mill job, but as it was shift work, it suited family life at the time.

I had a big move in 1990 to Manager at Montrose Sports Centre, which was managed by Tayside Regional Council. I reported to the Rector at the Montrose Academy, who was ahead of his time in so many ways and strongly believed in working with the community.

As well as being responsible for the management of the centre, I worked

closely with Montrose Academy to ensure that the PE timetable was met and gave the pupils the opportunity to try different activities like yoga, archery and fencing.


I looked at what activities could be developed at the centre and worked to be able to accommodate this, leading to the same old problem: Too many participants and not enough coaches. So I worked with my team, helping them to get qualified to take classes, just like I had when I was starting out.

Squash was very popular at Montrose Sports Centre, with an excellent club that ran at least 5 ladies' and 5 men's teams playing in the regional leagues. Junior Squash was being promoted in the early 90's, so I got my Junior Squash Coaching Certificate (learning squash in Bellahouston came good) and started a junior squash club. It was popular, with lots of schoolchildren joining, all of them enjoying it and keen to play. I keep saying it, but it was great fun to work with these children.

I took up playing squash again for fun but also entered the leagues and played in the teams – not the first team, but as captain of the third team and in my second year, we won the third league!

I qualified as a Gym Joeys coach along with some of the other staff at the centre. I didn't coach the classes all the time, but it was great to do it now and again, as it was good fun.

With new activities and some promotion, the school holiday programmes went from having 20 children a day to over 100 a day. It was so good to see so many children taking part and enjoying activities. And yes, we had to bring in more staff and helpers: we were making a big difference to the local community.



A major addition to the centre was the Angus Sports Medicine Centre, which was set up in partnership with the local sports council and physiotherapists.

The Regional and District councils merged in 1996, meaning big changes. Three centres from the regional and six centres from the District Council were brought under one council. I was given the post of temporary Area Manager for one year managing five facilities, two in Montrose, two in Forfar and one in Brechin. If that wasn't enough, in the three years that this transition was happening, I attended Aberdeen University two nights a week, funding myself, and gained a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA).

The reorganisation ended, and three areas were set up. I was given the position of Area Manager, Arbroath area. I oversaw three leisure facilities, two high school pools and sports halls, a caravan park and the outdoor recreations which opened over the summer.

In 1998, I attended a Seminar on Quest, the Quality Improvement Scheme for the Sport and Leisure industry in the UK. I was really impressed and saw this as a great opportunity towards consistent service throughout the centres in Angus and volunteered to lead the implementation of Quest for all the leisure centres in the county.

I applied for and became a Quest Assessor in 1999, carrying out my first assessment that year. I was and am passionate about the Quest Scheme and really believe it makes a difference. I carried out many Quest assessments in my own time across Scotland, also giving talks to other leisure departments about Quest and what it was about.

In 1999, I was offered the position of Recreation Manager, Leisure Management

Service, encompassing all nine main facilities in Angus.

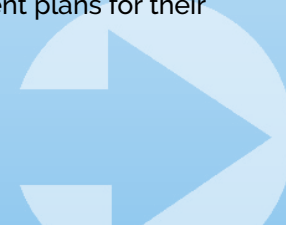
It was hard work and not always easy to get managers and staff to see the benefits, however over the next three years things did improve:

- Managers improved their business planning and marketing skills
- A Quality Management System was put in place for all areas for running leisure facilities.
- A culture of continuous improvement started.

In 2001, all facilities were registered with the Quest Quality Scheme, with three gaining Highly Commended in 2004, showing our efforts were rewarded.

I took on many challenges. My team and I developed the NHS Exercise by Prescription scheme in the Montrose area, in conjunction with the local medical centre and put in the systems to monitor it. It was so successful that it was rolled out to other areas. We created a lifeguard working group to enhance training standards and delivery of the service. We focused on child protection, working with many different groups to ensure safety. I became a member of the corporate Equal Opportunity Group and the Angus Well Being Group.

In 2004, I successfully gained the post of Principal Corporate Planning Officer with a remit to deliver and manage a programme of change across the council. I became an EFQM Assessor, an Investor in People Reviewer and carried out work with the Customer Excellence Scheme. Using the Public Sector Improvement Framework (based on EFQM), I worked with Social Work and Housing to develop and implement improvement plans for their departments.



## Jean – 50 years in Leisure!

Other areas of work included working with the media section of the council to develop the Angus Excellence Awards where I met great staff and had fun working with them. The awards were successfully held from 2007 to 2010.

I carried out many Quest Assessments across the whole of the UK, and visited many areas including the Isle of Man, Orkney, Shetland, most counties in Scotland, many areas around Manchester as well as areas in and around London. I was one of the Regional Assessors and held meetings for the assessors in Scotland and mentored many of the Scottish assessors.

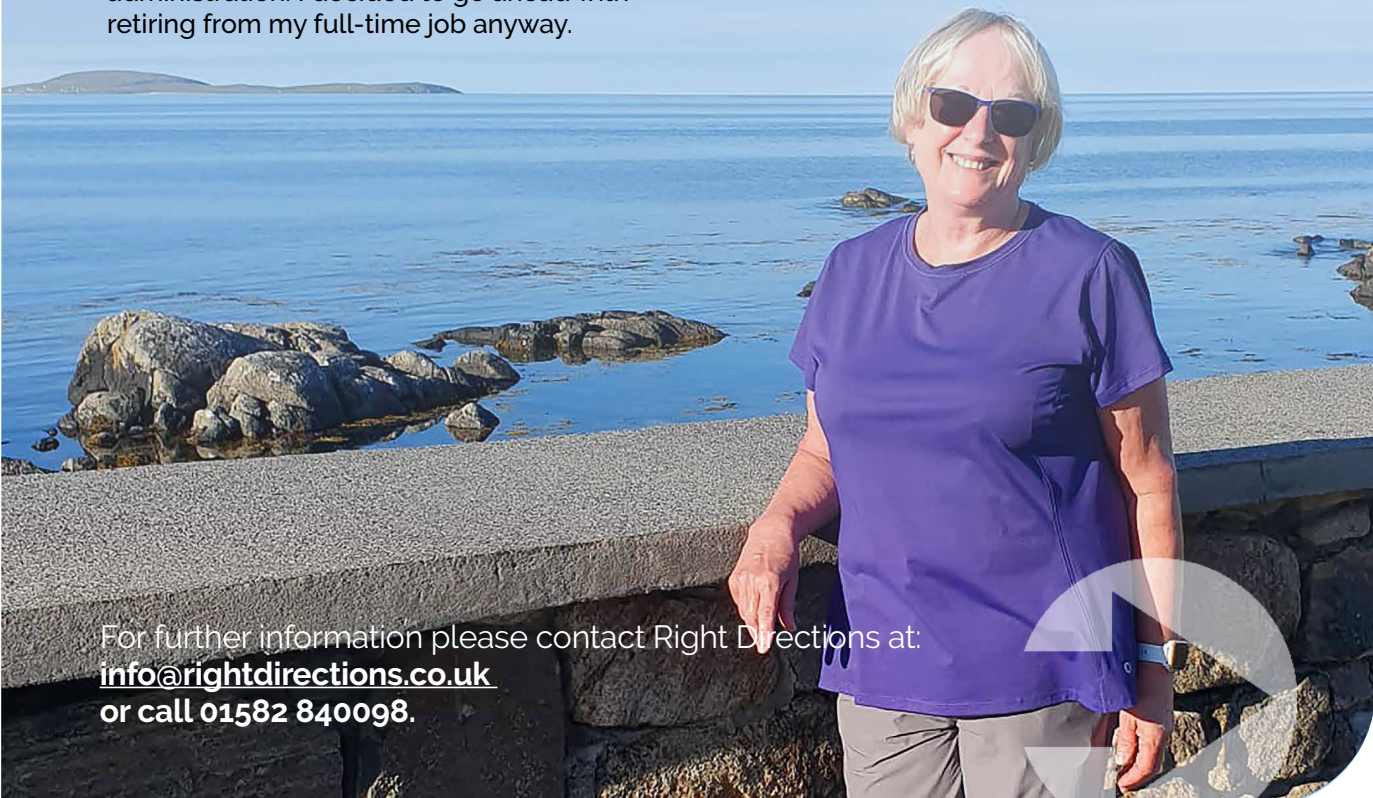
If I'm truthful, although the work as a Principal Corporate Planning Officer was different, I missed the vibrancy and dynamics of the leisure industry. In 2010, I was given the opportunity to take early retirement, and it seemed like a good idea as I could keep working with Quest, which aligned better with my passions. I signed the papers in June only to find out the next week that the company managing Quest on behalf of Sport England had gone into administration. I decided to go ahead with retiring from my full-time job anyway.

Right Directions took over the management of the scheme and, as well as being kept on the list as a Quest Assessor, I was given the opportunity to do proof reading. During the next seven years, I carried out many Quest assessments and travelled all over the country. I also learned about the many other strands of work that Right Directions carried out.

I felt privileged to visit so many leisure facilities and meet lots of interesting people.

Then Covid hit. Living in a small community was good during this time, as I was frequently crossing paths with everyone during our daily walks. It was quite a social experience, albeit at a safe distance.

I pretty much fell into my job in leisure and, over the years, with the help of many wonderful people and opportunities, I fell in love with working in leisure. Over the last few years, I've cut back on what I've been doing, but I'm glad that I got involved in the leisure industry back when I left school and the last fifty years have been brilliant.



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